

virus has not yet transferred from human to human, it looks and acts like the virus of 1918, more so than any other influenza outbreak in this century. Of the more than 100 people known to have contracted the virus in Asia, 50 percent have died.

If a pandemic flu hits our shores, all levels of government must work together if we are to avoid thousands of deaths. We in Congress must make sure the infrastructure and resources are in place to prepare for and combat a pandemic flu crisis.

The President has issued a call for action by a National Strategy on Pandemic Influenza. The key components of this strategy are international surveillance, domestic surveillance, vaccine development, stockpiling antivirals, communication, and State and local preparedness.

The legislation I have introduced today, the Influenza Preparedness and Prevention Act, supports and complements the administration's strategy. Most importantly, it sets us on a course to quickly develop and purchase vaccines and antivirals. For example, my bill calls for Health and Human Services to stockpile enough antivirals to treat 25 percent of the U.S. population. As the President has made clear, though, stockpiling is only a part of the strategy to combat a pandemic.

Vaccines are the ultimate defense against a pandemic. A vaccine developed by NIH shows early signs of promise for preventing the most dangerous strain of avian flu. My legislation calls on the Secretary of HHS to begin to stockpile doses of a viable vaccine. It also supports the continuing development by NIH of an effective vaccine and new technologies that will make it faster and easier to produce.

Madam Speaker, we do not have the vaccine manufacturing capacity in the United States to produce the doses we need to combat a pandemic. The number one barrier is more vaccine production, and to that production is the threat of lawsuits. We must have sensible liability reform as we search for a vaccine and build manufacturing capacity. My bill proposes limited liability protections for vaccine manufacturers and providers, with an exception to allow suits to proceed against companies who act with willful misconduct.

Education and communication are vital to prepare for a pandemic. The Centers For Disease Control and Prevention does fabulous work in public health education. My bill expands and supports their efforts to work with health providers and State and local health departments in this effort.

It is critical that we educate the public on both pandemic influenza and the garden variety flu we see every year. The more people become used to taking the annual flu vaccine, the easier it will be to get them in quickly for vaccinations in a pandemic. And the more business we provide for vaccine makers, the better our chances they will be

ready to gear up for the kind of production that we will need to stop a new strain from reaching pandemic levels.

Of course, the way to stop the avian flu outbreak from becoming a pandemic is spotting it and containing it as soon as possible. The CDS is working across the globe to detect and identify the avian flu virus and is working with foreign health officials on strategies to prevent outbreaks. This bill will expand this critical program and create an assistance program for helping nations to combat avian flu.

The pandemic may never happen, but we cannot put American lives at risk by failing to prepare and make proper investments. This legislation is just the beginning of the commitment that I will make to head off this potential pandemic. As chairman of the Appropriations Committee, I vow we will respond to the administration's emergency supplemental request, and the pipelines will be filled to meet this challenge.

GOP DOUBLE-TALK ON ENERGY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EMANUEL) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EMANUEL. Madam Speaker, this Wednesday, some of the biggest names in the oil industry are coming to Capitol Hill to testify why their companies are making record profits at the same time Americans are struggling to heat their homes and fill their cars with gasoline.

We are hearing some big talk out of the Republicans now. Senator DOMENICI said the oil executives "are going to get pounded on the price." Last week, my colleague from Georgia (Mr. KINGSTON), my friend, said that oil companies should "give back to the American people and put some of that profit toward lowering the cost of gas." Even the Speaker of the House said, "The oil companies need to do their part."

Man, you would think we were all Rip Van Winkle around here, as if we just woke up after 100 years. You might actually believe the Republicans were trying to do something about gas prices. I only wish this was the attitude and intention when we had the energy bill up on the Floor just only 6 weeks ago. Their tune was different then and winners were different then. Back then, they were all singing the energy industry's hymn. The chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee said, "This is a darned good bill, and this is going to help this country. The sooner we get it implemented, the better." Senator DOMENICI said that the energy bill was "the most important piece of energy legislation by Congress in 50 years."

Republicans may be talking a good game now, but the fact is that, until recently, the Republican Congress has done everything in its power to help oil and gas companies. The energy bill they passed this July actually con-

tained \$14.5 billion in taxpayer subsidies to oil and gas companies to drill for oil. We are subsidizing oil and gas companies when the price of a barrel is 65 bucks a barrel. In fact, the bill they passed, according to the Department of Energy, the bill actually increases the cost of gasoline. It increases the cost of gasoline so consumers pay more at the pump, and because of the tax subsidy, on April 15, we also pay more, all for big oil companies who are making record profits.

I think what the big oil companies miss and what we need is a little free market in this process. There is too much corporate welfare going on. Most recently, this Congress passed a refinery bill with an additional \$2 billion in handouts to oil and gas companies. The worst part of it is that the refiners did not even ask for the bill; the Republican Congress just gave it to them.

So why the sudden change towards the oil industry from cheerleader to detractor? Gas is around 3 bucks a gallon. Utilities are now predicting that families could pay as much as 70 percent more to heat their homes this winter, and 1 year from today is Election Day. So all of a sudden, everybody is realizing that they have to act really tough on the big oil companies.

Natural gas prices are so high that the Energy Department predicts the average bill for the average family will be \$350 more this season. American families are struggling with sky-high energy bills, and oil and gas companies are struggling with ways to count their cash.

ExxonMobil recently reported that their profits increased by 75 percent in the third quarter. Shell's earnings increased 68 percent. Phillips' third quarter, 89 percent; BP Amoco, a 34 percent rise in quarterly earnings. And what did we do in Congress the same season? We gave them \$14 billion a year to help them drill for oil, which is their business plan.

Now, I do not know about you, but my view is, if you are making record profits, somewhere north of 80 percent, the last thing we want to ask the consumers is to subsidize your business plan. You are in the business of looking for oil and getting it to consumers, and the taxpayers should not be in the business of subsidizing it. You should get a wake-up call on what the free market is like.

ExxonMobil is the largest donor to the Republican Party, and that is why we produced a piece of legislation that gave them one of the biggest handouts to corporate beneficiaries. But I cannot fault the oil companies; it is just a good investment for them. Since 1980, big oil and big gas have given the Republican Party well over \$200 million in support, and they have gotten \$14.5 billion in taxpayer subsidies. Where else can you get an investment like that with a return like that? You cannot get that on Wall Street.

Now, with their approval ratings at an all-time low, all of a sudden, Republicans are trying to figure out how to

punish big oil. Big, big talk. Do you think anything is going to come out of it? The first thing they can do is give back the \$14 billion. The second thing they can do is give back the \$2 billion, all of which were assessed on the taxpayers to subsidize these companies.

So, Madam Speaker, it is wrong to hand out money to energy companies who are making massive profits, and then cut home heating assistance for our most vulnerable citizens, our senior citizens. And it is wrong to claim to be doing something when you are not, nor do you have any intention. And when you had a chance to do it, rather than help the consumers, what did you do? You actually produced a bill that actually increased the price of gas at the pump and gave \$14 billion that you did not have to big oil companies to support them to execute their business plan.

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Those are not the values of this country, and thank God they are not the values of the American people. We need a change of priorities. We need a new set of priorities. And we can do better, Mr. Speaker. The American people can do better. It is time we returned the People's House back to the people rather than to the auction house it has been to the big oil and gas companies.

HURRICANE RELIEF EFFORTS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. DRAKE). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. MCCAUL) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCCAUL of Texas. Madam Speaker, the people in the gulf coast States have always lived with the threat of devastating tropical weather, including hurricanes. In fact, the worst natural disaster to ever befall America was the Galveston hurricane of 1900.

To this day, I personally know many families who lost loved ones in this horrific hurricane some 105 years ago. In fact, my grandfather, who was only 8 years old at the time, barely survived the devastation, while some 10,000 perished trying to overcome the high waters.

My grandfather was heroically saved by rescuers who found him clinging to a tree in the flooded streets of Galveston. Sadly, it seems that history and nature have a way of repeating themselves.

Like in the Galveston hurricane of 1900, the streets of New Orleans were flooded to the tops of trees and homes by Hurricane Katrina, and people relied on the goodwill of others to survive that devastation. To that end, my home State of Texas has done an outstanding job in the Katrina relief effort, persevering in the face of Hurricane Rita, which made landfall on the Texas coast 1 month after Hurricane Katrina.

It goes without saying that our hearts and prayers are with those who are fighting for their lives and their

communities and the areas hit by these hurricanes. Despite their dire situation, I know how brave and capable the people are in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. They will overcome the damage and fully recover. They will rebuild and return home as they were meant to, but they will need our help and support.

Before Hurricane Rita hit, I visited the Katrina relief efforts in my district, and Vice President CHENEY and I met with the Texas Emergency Management Agency. They used computer models to demonstrate the effects of a hurricane similar to Katrina hitting the Texas coast. The images revealed that Galveston Island could be completely submerged and the streets of Houston flooded if a strong hurricane were to hit that region.

At the time, we could not have known that this similar scenario would play itself out in Texas in just a matter of days. Fortunately, Galveston and the greater Houston area were saved; and unlike Galveston a hundred years ago, there was no direct loss of life due to Hurricane Rita. This is due to the efforts of the real heroes of the State and local first responders who protected life before the storm struck.

To that end I would like to thank everyone who has stepped forward and helped the hurricane victims by donating, volunteering, and working together to overcome this tragedy, especially Texas Governor Rick Perry; Austin Mayor Will Wynn; Houston Mayor Bill White; Katy Mayor Doyle Callendar; Tomball Mayor, Hap Harrington; Harris County Judge Robert Eckels; Ann Hodge and the Katy Chamber of Commerce; Bruce Hillegeist and the Tomball Chamber of Commerce; Tomball Fire Department Chief Randy Parr; and the Interfaith Ministries of Greater Houston. Their leadership, persevering through sheer tragedy, has been invaluable to the response and recovery process from both storms.

This cooperation partnership, brotherhood, community and faith, all succeeding in the face of absolute disaster, is truly an example of the resilience of the American spirit.

If nothing, this can teach us that if we plan ahead and work together, we can save lives and overcome the worst of nature's fury. This common bond is our duty as friends, as neighbors, and as Americans.

40TH ANNIVERSARY OF MEDICARE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. KAPTUR. Madam Speaker, I rise this evening during this 40th anniversary year of Medicare as a strong supporter of this critical health insurance lifeline to all of America's families. On July 30, 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed Medicare into law, the most important and successful family insurance program our Nation has ever known.

Medicare was created to provide health insurance to the elderly and disabled in part because only about half of our Nation's elderly and almost all of the disabled actually never had had health insurance. Medicare also played a fundamental role, along with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, in desegregating the American health insurance system by assuring access to care regardless of race or age.

Medicare began with 19 million beneficiaries, and since then it has served a total of approximately 105 million people over the last 40 years. Medicare has evolved over time to help beneficiaries maintain health, prevent disease and injury and provide better benefits, including more preventive care, even as inflation pushed the cost of health care higher and higher.

Medicare, which covered about 42 percent of expenditures for the elderly in 1968, covered about 55 percent by 1997. Without it, citizens simply could not cope financially as private companies reneged on their promised health and pension benefit to retirees.

Today, Medicare provides comprehensive health insurance for nearly 42 million Americans, which includes more than 35 million senior citizens and 6 million people under 65 years of age who are permanently disabled. It continues to achieve its purpose of improving health and financial security for beneficiaries by assuring access to affordable health care and contributing to the significant decrease in poverty among the elderly, which has fallen from nearly 30 percent in 1966 to approximately 10 percent in 2002. What a profound accomplishment we have achieved as a people to make the golden years livable, not threatening.

Most recently, however, in 2003, this Congress moved to add a prescription drug benefit coverage program to Medicare. While I have always supported Medicare as an important lifeline for seniors and the disabled, I could not support this particular legislation championed by the current Republican Party and the pharmaceutical industry. It did nothing to lower the exorbitant prices of prescription drugs, and yet it provides windfall profits to these very drug companies.

The bill is known as the Medicare Prescription Drug Modernization Act, and it was passed in this Chamber only after the Republican leadership bent their own rules during an all-night session to hold open the vote past the normal 15 minutes to nearly 3 hours as they twisted arms to get the bill passed.

I supported the Democratic plan that would have really provided an affordable drug plan for our seniors. Among the shortcomings of the law that seniors are now dealing with is that our government is not permitted to negotiate with the drug companies for the best price. I tried to get that amendment included in the bill and waited up in the Rules Committee until 4:30 in the morning and was denied my ability